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ABSTRACT

Groups of boys and girls at two summer day camps in 1970 were interviewed on the manner in which they viewed television, thought about it, and talked about it among themselves. The areas explored were: (1) the types of programs which they reported liking or disliking, (2) the types of programs which they felt informed them, (3) their attitudes toward commercials, and (4) the factors associated with their perception of the credibility of the various types of presentations of roles, situations, and information. Information also was sought on the manner in which disputes with parents or siblings over which programs to watch were managed. The children were found to prefer entertainment programs and to consider most commercials annoying. Family conflicts over which program to watch appeared to be a powerful stimulus for political interaction within the family. (Author/PF)

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Children Talk About Television

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Institute for Juvenile Research

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Introduction

Children and their families and friends no longer live in "the new world of television" which Schramm (1969: ch. 2) and Himmelweit (1958) sought to explore some years ago. What was novel in America and Britain during the 1950s certainly is now no longer so. Far from being a new toy and focus of curiosity, television has become standard and generally unquestioningly accepted part of the social milieux of children and adults. Television is ubiquitous and pervasive in American life and seemingly productive of its own kind of stabilized definitions and moralities (Surgeon General's Report on Violence, 1972). Ninety-five per cent of American households have TV (Pocket Data Book, USA, 1971: 296) and "the TV" is a fixture in most homes, even in the most isolated community and poorest of ghettos.

Television, along with the other mass media, provides opportunities for indirect learning and socialization (Schramm, 1961; Weiss, 1966, 1971), compared to the more "direct" chances given by personal confrontation and interaction. However, Bandura and Walters (1963) have argued strongly that symbolic models presented by the mass media play a major role in shaping behavior and in modifying conformity to social norms. Especially may this be true for a medium such as television, to which a great deal of children's time is devoted, though it be leisure time and for entertainment, principally. Witty (1966), e.g., who has carried out frequent studies in the Chicago metropolitan area, found that in 1965 the average elementary school child watched twenty hours of television per week, a figure that has held constant, with a fluctuation of one hour either way, throughout the period 1949-1965.

Though the above figure may be subject to program and daily variation, the number of sets and the hours of watching certainly suggest a probable influence of this medium either in conflict or in varying degrees of accordance with other socialization influences, such as parents, schools and peer groups.

Given the apparent extent of exposure to this medium, it also is probable that television constitutes a vehicle of social learning for the growing youngster equal to or perhaps even exceeding the influence of other socialization agents. Television presents, for instance, models of occupations and careers, social moralities and norms, and it depicts life in the adult world in general. This paper is a report of a preliminary study on the manner in which children view, think about television and talk about it among themselves. The particular areas explored are: 1) the types of programs which young boys and girls report liking or disliking; 2) the types which they feel inform them; 3) their attitudes toward commercials; and 4) the factors associated with their perception of the credibility of the various types of presentations of roles, situations, and information. In addition, information is provided on family interaction involving "The Set(s)", e.g., parental control of type or amount of viewing and the ways in which disputes with parents or siblings over which programs to watch are handled.

Data Collection and Method

Interviews were conducted with small groups of children who ranged in age from six to twelve at two summer day camps, one for boys, the other for girls.[2] The children were interviewed (during the summer of 1970) in small groups of generally four or five persons rather than singly in order to provide what might be a more relaxed, informal atmosphere in which the

children could perhaps stimulate each other to consider more types of programs than they might if alone. Groups were homogeneous with regard to sex and age, only two groups having an age range of more than two years. The age distribution of the boys and girls and the number of groups interviewed at each (median) age are given in Table 1.

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These summer camps were selected as sources for subjects because it was assumed that the children would be from relatively affluent families, and therefore be freer to develop their own preferences in programming due to there being more TV sets available in the household. It also was felt that these children might be more articulate about their likes, dislikes and opinions than some others and therefore serve as culture models for TV viewing.

The children lived in the suburbs surrounding both summer day camps. Their fathers were for the most part in professional and managerial occupations. The apparently wealthy nature of their backgrounds was evident in occasional remarks concerning the "maid" or the "maid's room." Precise data concerning parental occupation, education and level of income were not available from camp intake records. Their comfortable backgrounds also were reflected in the number of television sets in their home. The overall mean for the number of television sets in the subject's households was 3.11. The overall mean for the number of color television sets in each household was 1.27. This is contrasted with the national figure of 37.8 per cent households possessing a color television set (Pocket Data Book, USA, 1971: 201). The comparable figure for our sample is 82%. Thirty-three per cent of the respondents asked or responding to the question

reported two or more color television sets in the household. Black and white television sets were even more prevalent. No subject reported no television sets in the home, even when the medium was not looked upon favorably by the parents.

A basic pattern was followed during the interview discussion with the children. The questions were put informally to each of the children in a group and each child was permitted and encouraged to respond. The responses are interesting in at least showing trends of the data in such informal circumstances. The interviews were tape recorded, subsequently transcribed and analyzed.

Results

Television Program Likes and Dislikes

The children were asked: "Which programs do you like best?" or "What are your favorite programs televised?", and the types of programs disliked. Answers to these questions were subsequently categorized according to a typology constructed to reflect the range and variation of program contents. The typology essentially is similar to those employed by other researchers in this area, e.g., Schramm (1961: 63), who divided various types of programs into categories of "reality" and "fantasy." The categories of the typology, a short description of their content and some examples of programming for each type current for summer of 1970 in the geographic area of our study are listed below:

1. Cartoons: Animated films which depict human, humanoid, superhero, animal or imaginary creatures and their adventures, e.g., "Flintstones," "Superman," "Pink Panther."

2. Human acted Fantasy: Programs enacted by human actors which portray characters and situations "markedly different" from the regular daily

life experiences of human beings, e.g., "Munsters," "Dark Shadows," "Land of the Giants."

3. Situation Comedy: Lighthearted depictions of family, community and friendships, e.g., "Brady Bunch," "Lucy," "Green Acres," "That Girl."

4. Mystery-Adventure (Drama): Dramatic, suspense and "action" programs which depict the adventures of spies, detectives, cowboys, doctors, lawyers, e.g., "F.B.I.," "Mannix," "Hitchcock," "Medical Center," "Bonanza," "movies," "soap operas."

5. Childrens' Comedy Shows: E.g., "Bozo's Circus," "Captain Kangaroo," "Sesame Street."

6. Variety Shows: E.g., "Andy Williams," "Red Skelton," "Glenn Campbell."

7. Games: E.g., "Let's Make a Deal," "Jeopardy."

8. Sports

9. Documentaries: E.g., "Specials," "Land and Seas," and "National Geographic."

10. News

11. Talk Shows

This typology was constructed to include only those programs actually mentioned by the children as liked or disliked. Therefore some possible other categories of programs are not included. While the children's conversations indicated familiarity with all of these categories of programs, their favorites tended to be those in the cartoon, fantasy, situation comedy, and drama categories. The frequencies of mention of shows of these types are given in Table 1. The patterns of preferences were quite different for boys and for girls and for children of different ages.

At all ages, boys said that they liked cartoons more often than did girls; for all but the oldest boys, cartoons were a clear favorite over other types of programs. For both boys and girls, the popularity of cartoons decreased with age. Corresponding to this decline of preference for cartoons, there was an increase in mentions of adult-drama programs as favorites, with boys of all ages mentioning them somewhat more often than girls. These two age trends reflect changing tastes, with a general shift in preferences to more adult programming. There was no clear age trend apparent in preferences for fantasy, but boys did mention them fairly frequently, girls rarely. Again, no age trend was evident in preferences for situation comedies, but a striking sex difference was revealed. This type of program was quite popular for girls of all ages, was in fact their clear favorite. Boys, on the other hand, hardly ever mentioned them as programs they liked. For boys, these programs were mentioned even less frequently than sports (a category for which only one girl mentioned a liking). Even when boys did mention a situation comedy, it was usually a non-family type, such as "Get Smart," not the family type most mentioned by girls, such as "The Courtship of Eddie's Father" or "The Brady Bunch."

Comical and lighthearted programs predominated among the preferred choices. Watching television was fun for the children in our sample. The prevalence of this orientation to the medium was clear during the interview sessions. The mention of a character or specific incident often led to hilarity and trading of jokes and incidents. This sometimes posed group management problems for the interviewer, but it was expressive of the role of the medium in the life of the subjects. The other major category of programs that appealed to both sexes were the mystery-suspense-drama programs such as "Mannix," "Hawaii-5-0," "Mission Impossible," and medical

dramas. These programs were a source of considerable interest and fascination. In general, it was action and comedy that the children said they liked.

A differing perspective on these functions of the medium in the life of the subjects was reflected in the type of programming that they disliked. There were far fewer specific programs named as being disliked than there were ones mentioned as being preferred. Especially in the "drama" category, "likes" were specific; "dislikes," generic (e.g., "love movies," "war movies," "westerns," etc.) The vocabulary of the children used to describe the programs that were not liked demonstrate to some extent the functions they expect television to provide for them. Programs they didn't like were described as "stupid," "dumb," "boring."

News and talk shows were disliked types of programs. News (although some exceptions were made for the sports and weather segments) by itself was mentioned more times than any other types of program. It clearly was the most disliked of all types of programs when combined with talk shows into an "informational" category. This is another bit of evidence concerning the functions of television for the sample. "Talk," in general, didn't interest them, but "stories" and "action" did. Some repugnance for the news was shown, with the children citing the horrible events they had seen shown. Documentaries (which, as mentioned by these children, were mainly of the entertaining "people-animals-other lands" genre) can be described as both informational and entertaining and they tended to like those. Of the other actualité programs, the boys liked sports, the girls disliked them.

The high ranking of children's programs as a dislike is of interest. Programs in this category were presentations such as "Bozo's Circus," "Captain Kangaroo" or "Tree Top House" or "Romper Room." The children used

these types of programs as a negative reference point. They said they didn't like them because they were "babyish." By such statements they showed themselves and the interviewers that they were themselves growing up and rejecting such programs. Other evidence for the rejection of "baby" shows came from the data on "liked" programs. While respondents generally agreed on "liked" programs, whenever one person mentioned these (particularly "Bozo's Circus") as liked, the group dissolved into hoots of derision.

Attitudes toward Commercials

The children were uniformly negative in response to the initial question regarding their attitudes toward commercials. But this general antipathy, based on the manner in which commercials intruded into their viewing, was partially put aside by the amusement and hilarity which a small number of commercials provoked in them. The amusement and discussion that mention of those particular commercials generated is one testimony to the possible effectiveness of the advertising, at least in terms of product recognition.

The main reason given by the respondents, in virtually all groups, for their overall dislike of commercials was the manner in which they interfered with their enjoyment in viewing various types of programs, particularly at peaks of suspense or tension -- or during hockey games or fights. One even timed the commercials and felt that they took up too much time; those who hand't timed them overestimated their relative time, estimating that they took up as much as 50% of the total time of viewing.

Despite these general complaints, specific commercials were frequently mentioned as being liked. In fact, the children could recall over three times as many commercials that they liked compared to those they did not like (similar to the number of specific programs liked/disliked). Most commercials were downgraded; particularly disliked ones were not easily

recalled (perhaps "tuned out"). Ones which were found especially more entertaining, amusing or informative, were contrasted to the general dull, unappealing business appeals.

A wide range of products were included in the more favored commercials. Cigarette commercials were the most frequently cited. One quarter of the boys' citations were in this category. Alka Seltzer was the most frequently cited product. Interestingly enough, a large proportion of the advertisements cited were for products intended to be consumed by adults: cigarettes, beer and stomach pacifiers. These forms of advertising were probably very successful in the socialization of adult consumption preferences in the subjects, in terms of product recognition and probably also in terms of the construction of adult tastes. Cigarette commercials were also the most frequently cited type of advertising disliked. Perhaps it was just a chance matter, due to the high incidence and variability of cigarette advertising on the medium, at that time, that this category of product advertising entered high in both likes and dislikes. Several children also were aware of the dangers of smoking and mentioned some of the cancer prevention presentations then on TV. Some subjects said that cigarette advertising should be banned; others recognized that such a ban was impending.

Although they disliked much of the advertising, especially the manner in which it interrupted the flow of the programs, they had rationale for its (commercial) necessity. The following exchange, for instance, demonstrates the way in which some ten-year-old girls perceived this matter: Interviewer: "Why do they do that"? (interrupt programs at exciting moments with commercials) -- "They pay money so you watch T.V." -- "To get you to watch some more. They want you to watch T.V. so that you watch the ad." "In England where you don't have ads you have to pay to watch T.V."

Similar explanations were given by other children.

In partial summary, commercials were regarded as a tedious but necessary nuisance. They constantly interrupted programs, frequently at the most exciting moments. But these overall attitudes were softened by the appeal of the minority of commercials that were found to be attractive and compelling. Recall of these commercials and their absurd or hilarious aspects formed a common set of shared views which the subjects employed as a medium of communication and material for further amusement between themselves.

Evaluating the Credibility of Television Presentations

A discriminating attitude for evaluating the veracity of particular commercials was noted among the children when we discussed those types of presentations above. Particular programs are not accepted as "true" representations of reality solely because they appear on the television screen. The manner in which the subjects evaluated the credibility of what they saw on the screen was explored by asking them what they believed of what they saw on television; what they did not believe; and why they held these specific attitudes toward specific programs or types of programs. Analysis of the responses revealed four types of considerations to us which the subjects invoked when they assessed the credibility of television presentations. The types are:

1. "External" verification. (Comparison with own experience)

In this case a plot, personage or event was discredited or validated as (perhaps) real on the basis of the respondent's actual experience of the phenomenon or some aspects of it. This included instances in which media fare was discredited because it was perceived to contradict the senses of the viewer, e.g., incongruities, "clean" active children, etc.

2. "Internal" verification. (Exercise of logic)

A second way in which the children assessed the credibility of a program or episode was through internal examination of the plot to reveal some consistency and coherence or lack of them in the program patterning, expressed largely in terms of "proof."

3. Validation by Authorities.

A third basis for assessing the validity of media presentations was used by the children: the acceptance or rejection of the veracity of the output because of the testimony of some authority. Programs such as "FBI" and "Adam 12" were believed because statements that they were true or based on actual episodes or events were made during the programs. Others were believed because of the reputation or occupation of the narrator, or (in the case of commercials) because they thought misrepresentation was illegal.

4. Dramaturgical License.

The final type of standard imposed by the subjects in evaluating the credibility of television programming was what we might term "dramaturgical license." The children realized in these cases that the events or persons depicted could not actually have occurred but accepted them as departures from the constraints of pure representation which were legitimated by the dramaturgical conventions of the productions (Klapp, 1964: 66-100). They were aware of stunt men, cameras, and physiological limitations, but they did not let this knowledge interfere with their enjoyment of a story.

5. Unresolvable cases.

The subjects admitted that they were sometimes unable to decide whether or not a specific item of television presentation was believable. They may have used any or all of the four types of standards mentioned above but found that they could not come to a conclusion on the basis of the evidence

available to them. Remarks of two children illustrate this comparatively uncommon situation: (1) "I'm not sure on some things, cause it's hard to tell. I watched that one time and this guy was taking drugs...and he kept on sticking them in him(self). You can't tell. You really don't know." (2) "I saw this thing about deadly bees...about training bees to kill people. It could be true."

The first and fourth of the above standards, the external and dramaturgical, were the most commonly employed when groups in the sample were asked why they believe some programs and why they did not believe others. A clear age trend was not evident in the relative frequency of the use of these criteria but it seems reasonable to hypothesize that as children become older and develop a higher level of (cognitive?) capacity, they would be less likely to rely on statements of authority and more likely to use independently applied and more rational (critical?) external, internal and dramaturgical standards. These would appear to be methods that adults would use in rational appraisal of the veracity or credibility of particular program presentations. The frequent use of these considerations by groups in the sample in assessing the crediblity of programs is some evidence of a particular kind of sophistication in their attitude toward the medium.

Some critical discrimination also was apparent in the responses they gave to the questions concerning the programs they believed and the particular programs they did not believe. Programs mentioned as ones they believed were almost exclusively "actualité" presentations which broadcast actually occurring events, such as sports, documentaries, reports on actual events, such as the news; and depictions which claimed to reproduce events which had actually occurred, e.g., "FBI," "Dragnet," and other programs which purported to be reconstructions of real episodes. Programs which were not

believed were almost exclusively fantasy programs, such as monster movies and science fiction; cartoons, especially those of the superhero and animal type, and fictional dramatic programs. Although they were ready to suspend "normal" standards of belief to enjoy specific fantasy and other non-representative media programs, they clearly were able to distinguish between the realistic and the fantasy or fictional bases of a specific program. Outside of "belief" and "disbelief," they mentioned no criteria for the judgment of "truth" and "untruth."

Learning from Television

Not only were the children capable of discriminating between the above two broad categories of programs and judging their credibility (appropriately), but they were able to discriminate among them as to which were the more likely to promote their learning. The subjects were asked what things they had learned on television. Most of the responses concerned learning associated with watching documentary programs, such as those which dealt with other lands and peoples, social and scientific issues, historical events and animals. Programs such as "The Underwater World of Jacques Cousteau," "Lands and Seas" and "Discovery 70" frequently were mentioned in this respect.

There was generally little demonstration by the subjects of the type of learning that has been called "indirect learning," the process of acquiring norms, values and role orientations from exposure to media imagery (Schramm, 1961: 75). Occasional comments, however, did suggest this sort of influence. One subject, for instance, replied to the question: "What have you learned on television?":

> "Not to have a father or mother who looks like a hippi. 'Cos I was watching a TV program and they had a father's day and all the fathers

were supposed to come on a different day. And the guy didn't want his father to come because he was a writer."

Conflict and Control in the Family over the Allocation of Television Viewing Time

Television always is a potential source of conflict in households and families because of competition between family members to control access to, and choice of, programs to be watched at prime times of peak demand, such as the evenings, when several family members may each wish to view different programs. The manner in which disputes are generated and resolved (or not) provides interesting insights into the allocation of rights and privileges and the decision-making process in families.

The relatively widespread availability of television sets in our subjects' households would lead us to expect that conflict would be less frequent and intense in their homes, since accommodation probably would be more easily reached than in the circumstance where there was only one set. Nevertheless, the general availability of sets did not entirely prevent conflict. And even when there were a large number of sets in the household, conflict could focus not upon the several black and white sets, but upon the more preferred and less available color sets.[3] Thus conflict over rights to watch the color and black and white sets as well, was a common occurrence in the homes of the children.

The subjects were asked a question to measure the extent of conflict over viewing rights and privileges. Nearly two-thirds of those responding reported that they did have conflicts with brothers and sisters. (A separate question which dealt with parent-child conflict subsequently was asked, responses to which are reported later in this paper). About one-third of the children reported that they did not fight with their brothers and

sisters over which programs and sets to watch at particular times. Only 6 subjects reported that they had many conflicts with their brothers and sisters over viewing privileges.

Further questions were asked in order to probe the proliferation of such arguments. The relative importance of the availability of several TV sets in resolving viewing disputes in households is suggested by the fact that number of sets was the third most frequently reported means for settling such arguments. In 19.64% of the reported cases, subjects reported that the availability of other sets in relation to the one in dispute (usually the color set in the "family" room) facilitated the settlement of the argument. The use of multiple televisions to resolve disputes, however, was not the most frequent method of resolution mentioned. The most frequent way was the usage of various orderly rules for arbitration of disputes. Often, though, the multiple availability of TV sets facilitated the application of specific kinds of rules.

Four different types of rules for settling these disputes, in order of their frequency of mention, could be distinguished: 1) first come, first served; 2) compromise -- the sharing of disputed time among contesting parties, including alternating; 3) voting; and 4) rules in favor of specific family members. Children occasionally mentioned changes in their ways of handling disputes. If the number of sets increased, there was less use of rules, more use of more than one set (although the rules could still be used to determine who got the use of the preferred set). In other cases, a reduction in the number of sets was accompanied by increased conflict and greater resort to rules. Also, the time-sharing rule was sometimes combined with other rules according to the circumstances, e.g., when children who usually used "first come, first served" compromised on occasions when

both wanted to watch for extended periods, like when both were home sick from school.

The least impartial group of rules specified privileges for specific members of the family. They generally were not rationalized or excused if they gave viewing privileges and priorities to the parents. Presumably, the relative lack of explicit legitimation of parental privileges might reflect the general acceptance of parental authority. Several times, for instance, the subjects simply remarked that, "My mom gets to watch whatever she wants," or words expressing similar feeling. But in the cases where they asserted privileges for particular children, they were justified in terms of an external rule or standard, such as educational needs of the child in question.

The youngsters were not always able to resolve their conflicts alone. In nearly 30% of the reported disputes, settlement followed some form of direct parental intervention. Parents often were involved in the settling of disputes and used some of the previously cited dispute resolution procedures. Parental intervention usually was provoked by the clamor which surrounded a dispute between children in an argument. In about one-quarter of the reported incidents another precipitant of parental intervention was mentioned, viz., the appeal of the aggrieved child to the parent. Generally, the parent reported to have intervened was the mother.

In ten cases it was possible to determine the nature of the settlement imposed by the intervening parent. In half of these cases, the dispute was settled in favor of one of the contesting parties, usually on the basis that either one or the other was there first or making all the trouble. Other means of settling the dispute were: 1) sending one of the parties to watch his program preference on another set; and 2) turning off the TV set.

Other Forms of Parental Control of Viewing

It appears from our interviews that parental control of the viewing patterns of their children was rather an infrequent occurrence. Generally, the children reported that they were left to view whatever they wished apart from three sets of parental restrictions. Parents did not so much positively guide the viewing of their children as they occasionally interceded to prevent or control their viewing in special circumstances. The first form of parental intervention was that reported in the section above: parents intervened to settle disputes among their children. The second common form of intervention occurred when parents prevented their children from viewing in order that they perform duties around the household, such as coming to the dinner table with the rest of the family or going to bed. Last, there was intervention to prevent children from watching programs that were considered undesirable for any reason. Only a minority of children reported this type of restriction. The programs reported proscribed were what the subjects called "bad movies" (i.e., "adult" programs, often with a sexual theme), horror movies, plays and suspense programs, e.g., "Hitchcock."

Discussion

It seems reasonable from this analysis of the program preferences of the subjects that their prime orientation to the medium is for entertainment rather than information, though some communication of facts takes place even in programs of amusement. This finding is in line with the results of other studies, e.g., Schramm (1961: 75) and Himmelweit (1958: 264), who called this process "incidental learning."

It is quite clear that youngsters six-thirteen years old have definite opinions of and preferences for TV programs and that they are irritated by

frequent or action-suspending commercials, even though some they find quite entertaining. It also is clear that the most liked and the most disliked types of programs are not the same for boys and girls or older and younger children. Declining preferences for children's programming is, of course, predictable. This tendency was, however, less pronounced for the girls, who were less likely than boys to prefer them at any age. The possibility that the girls might be more inclined than boys to try to impress the interviewers (or each other) with reports of preference for more adult-oriented programming was considered. However, the statements made by boys and girls regarding arguments with their siblings indicated that their stated preferences reflected their actual viewing -- when boys and girls were involved in disputes, their choice was often between a family-type program (girls) and an action show (boys). When older and younger siblings differed, the choice was often between programs designed specifically for preschool children and those which were not.

Since the children's reports of what their (older or younger) sisters or brothers wanted to watch tended to corroborate the separate reports of what boys and girls said they themselves preferred, some elements of the preferred programs were examined. The differences most illuminating had to do with the sex of the star or protagonist. Virtually all of the cartoon heroes are male and most are strong and "true." The few heroines tend to be addled, good-hearted but inept and they are saved repeatedly by males; while similar inept heroes are saved by chance.

In the "fantasy" category, the science fiction and horror shows generally employ males as the lead actors. Regarding adult dramas, actresses often have noted the scarcity of good roles. Indeed, one finds few women among the doctors, lawyers, detectives, sheriffs, ranch owners, police,

etc. The sports events televised, with the exception of special events such as the Olympics and some odd spectacles such as roller derbies, are all-male affairs. The "family" shows and situation comedies seem to be virtually the only shows in which women and girls have important and continuing roles. The fact that the girls tended to like these programs better than boys at all ages and to mention "age oriented" programs less often as favorites, may simply reflect differences in the role structure of the programs. Perhaps boys may more clearly show changes in preferences because more types of programs provide them with characters with whom they might identify and situations to stimulate their fantasy. Of course, the tendency for girls in this age range to have "crushes" on young actors also probably contributes to the popularity of the family shows. Whether the same types of differences in preferences between boys and girls and between children of different ages would be found in less affluent children or among adolescents are questions which will require additional comparative research.

These children ordinarily could watch what they wished, even when others in the family desired to watch something else, simply by moving to another set. It is interesting to speculate that children in homes with only one set may not be as likely to see or to develop preferences for age-appropriate programming if, for example, older children or parents can't stand the children's shows. Such a finding would be rather disturbing, since it would indicate that educational children's shows might not regularly be reaching the audience for whom they could be most beneficial.

By and large, the interviewed children indicated that they had developed criteria for differentiating truth and untruth, reality and fantasy. Their judgments of credibility were independent of their preferences; liking or disliking particular types of shows or commercials depended on whether

the programs bored or entertained them, not on whether the presentations were believable or informed them. While they seemed pretty well able to separate the credible and incredible in fiction, they tended to show a touching naievete in the area of fact. They had not "graduated," so to speak, to the adult stance of doubting that which is merely "said" to be true. Dramas said to be based on actual events, documentaries, news programs and claims made in commercials were believed. The children did not seem to consider the concepts of "bias" or of "lying." It appears that even the most critical children could come under the blandishment of "institutionalized deceit," that is, a degree of non-truth perceived and accepted as such by adults almost as endemic to the social structure about them. Feshbach and Singer (1971: 158-159) have suggested that the perception of violence may differ when viewed within different aesthetic contexts; perhaps the perception of credibility might also be influenced by contexts suggesting greater or lesser "truthfulness" or variations in child development of likes and dislikes. How and when one begins to question statements of "fact," no matter what the context, is a matter for further research.

Certainly, though, there are many ways in which children can acquire the information and experience necessary for the evaluation of credibility. Television itself provides some of it, as do other media, formal education, etc. Parents also help to shape both the children's preferences and their perceptions of credibility. The fact that parents are able to control the viewing habits of their children by so-called non-social methods has been cited by Chaffee, et al., (1971), Greenberg and Dominick (1968), and Hess and Goldman (1962). Indirect influences on children's viewing based on the structure of communicatory relationships between parent and adolescent have been elaborated in a series of exploratory studied by McLeod, et al., (1966),

Chaffee, et al., (1966) and McLeod, et al., (1967). In our interviews, we asked only about direct parental controls. These youngsters reported only a little direct control, usually in the form of 1) a small amount of censorship; 2) insistence on time spent on other tasks; and 3) settling intersibling disputes.

We found particularly intriguing the frequency with which the children mentioned conflict with their siblings or their parents over which program to watch, and the variety of methods used for conflict resolution. It appears that television, besides its relatively direct functions of entertainment and education, also serves as a quite powerful stimulus for political interaction within the family. Broadcasters compete for viewers, of course, and insofar as competing programs appeal to different tastes, one of the consequences of this is conflict in the home. The resolution of this conflict involves both parents and children in negotiations for the allocation of a more or less scarce resource (even when there are several sets, one is generally preferred). Even young children on a recurrent basis participate in family arguments. Demands, claims, rights, privileges and status distinctions are expressed and taken into account in deciding how TV viewing disputes are to be settled. How family composition variables (such as number, age and sex of children) and scarcity of resources (number and type of sets) affect the frequency of such disputes, perhaps the type of "political processes" engaged in by the family, and the outcome of negotiations (win-lose, sharing) are topics for future research.

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Footnotes

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[3]Cf. p. 4, supra.

Table 1. Frequencies of Mention of Programs Liked and Disliked by Median Age of Group and Sex

Type of Program		Boys 6-7	Boys 8-9	Boys 10-12	Boys Subtotal	Girls 6-7	Girls 8-9	Girls 10-12	Girls Subtotal	Total
n Ss per group		23	39	20	82	15	15	19	49	
1. Cartoons	Likes	35	25	8	68	11	8	1	20	88
	Dislikes	1	2	2	5	3	1	4	8	13
2. Fantasy	Likes	4	15	7	26	2	1	3	6	32
	Dislikes	0	0	2	2	2	0	1	3	5
3. Situation Comedy	Likes	3	2	5	10	11	16	17	44	54
	Dislikes	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	5	5
4. Drama	Likes	7	9	27	43	2	5	15	22	65
	Dislikes	1	7	13	21	0	7	4	11	32
5. Children's Comedies	Likes	1	0	0	1	1	2	0	3	4
	Dislikes	6	4	4	14	2	1	2	5	19
6. Variety	Likes	0	5	2	7	0	3	3	6	13
	Dislikes	4	0	5	9	0	1	3	4	13
7. Games	Likes	0	0	0	0	0	3	6	9	9
	Dislikes	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	2

(Table 1 continued on next page.)

Table 1 (continued)

Type of Program		Boys				Girls				Total
		6-7	8-9	10-12	Subtotal	6-7	8-9	10-12	Subtotal	
8. Sports	Likes	11	2	2	15	1	0	0	1	16
	Dislikes	3	1	0	4	10	3	0	13	17
9. Documentaries	Likes	8	2	7	17	0	0	4	4	21
	Dislikes	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
10. News	Likes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dislikes	5	4	8	17	8	2	0	10	27
11. Talk	Likes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Dislikes	0	1	5	6	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotals	Likes	69	60	58	187	28	38	49	115	302
	Dislikes	20	20	41	81	25	18	16	59	140